

Observing Our Thoughts

a 3 minute exercise of noticing what we are thinking



Instructions

Preface: Thoughts come into our minds and out of our minds all the time. We have very little control of what thoughts enter our mind. Watching our thoughts can be like watching TV or watching the waves of the ocean. In this exercise we are trying to use our observing mind to watch our thoughts with interest and curiosity. It is important that for this exercise, there is no “bad thought.” The goal of this exercise is simply to observe our thoughts like we would watch birds eating at a bird feeder or splashing in a bird bath. This exercise will last for about 3 minutes and is best done in silence.

1. Center Yourself: Take a few seconds to center yourself. Keep your eyes closed or at a soft gaze, be aware of your posture, take 3 deep full breaths, allow yourself to be in the present.

2. Observe Your Thoughts: Over the next 3 minutes, notice the thoughts that you are experiencing. The practice of observing your thoughts can be like watching a game of “duck hunt,” or watching cars drive by as you sit on your front porch. It can also be like gazing into a pond as clouds and various birds are reflected onto the water’s surface.

3. Document Your Thoughts: As you observe your thoughts write them down in the appropriate place in on the table. If you are not sure what category a thought belongs, don’t sweat it, just write it where you think it best fits. If your thought is about a task to do, it is probably future thought. If you are thinking about a loved one, it may be a past thought. If your thought is about a current sensation or feeling, this could be a present thought.

Debrief

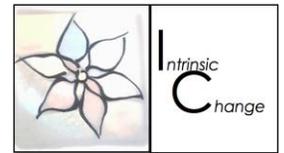
Preface: No one is forced to share their experience but you are invited to share with the group what you feel comfortable sharing.

1. Discussion: What was that like? What did you notice?

2. Implications: Too many thoughts about the past can facilitate depressed emotions, while too many thoughts about the future can lead to feelings of anxiety. On the other hand, thinking about the past can be grounding, meaningful or comforting and thinking about the future can bring hope.

3. Importance of Present: The present is always available to us. During this activity we were able to be in the present by using the observing self. When our thoughts or emotions get carried away, we can always come back to the present moment. It is unrealistic to think we will always be in the present, but the present is an important resource that is available to us in times of need. The habit of being in the present on purpose is sometimes referred to as mindfulness. With practice (such as mindfulness activities and mediation) it becomes easier to connect with the present.





Past	Present	Future

